HPV Vaccine

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Washington State Department of Health

What is the HPV Vaccine?

Two vaccines have been developed that can protect against some types of a virus that causes cervical cancer. The virus is called Human Papillomavirus (HPV). One vaccine, Gardasil, protects against four types of HPV which cause 70 percent of cervical cancers and 90 percent of genital warts. Gardasil was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in early June for girls and women ages 9 to 26 years. The other vaccine will protect against the two types of HPV that cause 70 percent of cervical cancers. This vaccine has not been licensed by the FDA.

The vaccines will not protect against all types of HPV or other sexually transmitted infections. The vaccines also will not prevent pregnancy.

It is hard to know how long new vaccines will protect against disease. So far, studies have shown that protection lasts 2.5 to 4.5 years. Research will continue to determine how long each vaccine's protection lasts.

Who should get the vaccine and when should they get it?

The federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends Gardasil for all girls age 11 to 12 years. However, because Gardasil is licensed for girls as young as 9 and as old as 26 health care providers may choose to give the vaccine to these age groups. These recommendations are provisional until published in the CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The vaccine is given as a series of three doses (shots) over a six month period. The HPV vaccine is a preventive vaccine and will have the maximum preventive impact if given before sexual activity begins. Current vaccine research has focused on girls and women. There is limited information about how well the vaccine works in boys and men.

Will the vaccine help if I already have HPV?

The vaccine will not protect women against any type of HPV in the vaccine that they have already acquired. Most women have not been infected with all the types of HPV that are in the vaccine. The HPV vaccine will do no harm if you are already infected.

Where can I get it?

Ask your doctor, nurse, or local health clinic to find out whether you need the vaccine and where you can get it.

What is HPV and how does it affect the body?

HPV is a very common virus. There are many types of HPV. Most are harmless and do not cause infections or symptoms. Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer or genital warts.

How is it spread?

HPV is spread through genital contact. Most people who have HPV do not have any symptoms. They can have the virus and easily spread it to others without even knowing.

Who can get it?

At least 50 percent of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. Both women and men can get HPV, and spread it to others without realizing they have the virus. HPV infection is most common in women and men in their late teens and early 20's.

The best way to prevent HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity. People with only one lifetime partner can get HPV if their partner had been sexually active in a previous relationship. The success of condoms in preventing HPV infection is uncertain. Condom users do have lower cervical cancer rates. HPV infections can occur in both male and female genital areas whether or not they are covered by a latex condom. Condoms are a good way to prevent sexually transmitted infections like HIV, gonorrhea, and chlamydia.

How do I know if I have HPV?

Some people know they have HPV because they have symptoms, such as genital warts. Most people **don't know** they have HPV because they have no signs or symptoms.

Women may find out they have HPV through cervical cancer screening (Pap tests) and HPV antibody testing. Healthcare providers usually do not test for HPV unless they find abnormal cervical cell changes. Providers don't routinely test women or men for HPV at this time. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have questions about HPV testing.

How does HPV cause cervical cancer?

Some types of HPV can infect cells in the cervix (the opening to the uterus/womb) and cause abnormalities. If the infection continues untreated, the abnormalities can lead to cervical cancer. This is usually a slow process. It can take years for HPV infection to progress to cervical cancer.

Pap tests can detect cell changes long before cervical cancer develops. Women who get the HPV vaccine should continue getting Pap tests. The vaccines do not protect against all the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

Where can I find more information?

HPV Infection & Vaccine

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	www.cdc.gov/std/hpv
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices	www.cdc.gov/nip/acip
American Social Health Association	www.ashastd.org
Food and Drug Administration	www.fda.gov/cber/vaccines.htm

Cervical Cancer

American Cancer Society	www.cancer.org
National Cancer Institute	www.cancer.gov

Washington State Department of Health Programs

Breast and Cervical Health Program	www.doh.wa.gov/wbchp
Comprehensive Cancer Control	www.doh.wa.gov/ccc
Family Planning and Reproductive Health	www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/FPRH
Immunization Program CHILD Profile	www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/std/

For additional information contact:

Michele Perrin, MPH, CHES
Health Promotion and Communication Manager
Immunization Program CHILD Profile
Washington State Department of Health
PO Box 47843
Olympia, WA 98504-7843
E-mail: michele.perrin@doh.wa.gov
(360) 236-3720 phone
(360) 236-3590 fax